

# Copy from Thomas Hart Benton papers

## Description

Copy of a page from the Thomas Hart Benton papers on the proposed mural for the Harry S. Truman Library. This page is a description of the mural by section.

## Date(s)

November 5, 1958

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To go back to the case of Benton. Whether or no direct actions in the field, prior to or in conjunction with, the formulation of the Bentonian expansionist philosophy are more or less important than that philosophy in the opening of the West is not a mural question. The mural question is which is the more meaningful in terms of imagery. The answer is obvious.

But there is yet another dilemma in this matter of personages. If Benton and Jefferson were put up in the mural as the chief figures in the opening of the West, how could Harry S. Truman, the chief figure in the history of Independence, be left out? He couldn't. Every Democrat in the United States would be barking at the muralists door if he was. But if included, how relate him to the historical theme? As a spectator, standing around looking on? Utterly inappropriate to his character. No good.

As a matter of historical fact it would be equally inappropriate to put Benton or Jefferson in such a role.

The upshot of all this—in the place of historical personages it was decided that a selection of representative types which could be actively engaged in the murals form and meaning, and which would symbolize, in an easily comprehensible way, the most significant operations at Independence and on the western scene, provided the only workable "out" for particular individuals as ~~particular~~ particular events.

How this selection was set up is as follows:

(1) Area above door—<sup>to B. S. E. (5 Edm.)</sup> primarily important, ~~the~~ A Pioneer Group. Oxen drawing "Prairie Schooner" showing up over brow of hill. Slow action, as if coming to rest. Another wagon in rear. Woman with children preparing meal over open fire. To left part of area man in front of oxen, with rifle tentatively raised, behind him another man in right part of area with <sup>rifle</sup> similarly raised. ~~Both~~ Both men in protective attitudes before women and children. The action here is not belligerent but precautionary. The hill above the door on which it takes place extends forward on each side of door to lower edge of design which (note analysis of technical problems) is located about four feet above floor.

(2) Area to left of door.

An Indian (probably Pawnee or Osage if we think of the Pioneer group as moving to the settlement of Independence) rises from behind bushes to present a pipe (calumet) to pioneer group. This explains raised rifles and cautious attitude of the pioneer group. These settlers, new to the West, could easily be unaware that the Indian offer of the pipe means peace. Knowing that, they could, because of accounts of the uncertainty of Indian conduct, still be suspicious. Reasonability of such an attitude is suggested by the presence of an Indian in war paint, armed with bow and arrows, who occupies the first and most forward plane of the area. He would, because of the bushes, from which the Indian with pipe rises, be out of sight of pioneer group. The action of this Indian is one of readiness. He does not pull his bow string but could  
INSTANTLY do so.

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8x10 inches (21x26 cm) Black & White

Keywords Artists Mural painting and decoration

HST Keywords Benton, Thomas Hart - Mural - Ref. to; Document

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